

Worship Barriers in Our Hearts

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11-12-07

Introduction.

- A. During our study of song worship yesterday, we spent two of three sessions talking about different kinds of hymns and the ways that they can promote or hinder worship. This is important because in many ways, the quality of hymn we use in worship is one of the easiest factors for us to control. However, the use of good hymns does not guarantee worship in our singing. We could select half a dozen of the finest hymns ever written, but if we have a group of atheists singing those hymns, no worship will occur.
- B. This points us, then, to the other main factor that determines whether we worship or not: the condition of our hearts. Just about all of us, if we are honest with ourselves, will acknowledge that there are times when our hearts are elsewhere during the worship service. We're thinking about dinner or the ball game or any number of other things, so we end up singing, but not worshipping. That is miles away from what God wants and expects out of us. He doesn't want some zombified façade of worship; He wants the real thing.
- C. This tells us, then, that just as a basketball player practices his jump shot, we need to practice having the right heart in worship. It's a matter of training, not talent. However, just like the basketball player who practices bad form will only make his shot consistently bad, if we just keep doing what we're doing without thinking about it first, we may well only succeed in making our worship consistently bad. Before we can figure out how to worship right, we have to identify the characteristics of worshipping wrong. With this in mind, then, let's look this evening at attitudes we may need to change. Let's look at some worship barriers in our hearts.

I. Apathy.

- A. The first barrier that we must struggle to overcome is **APATHY**. We run into this problem when we, for whatever reason, stop caring as much as we should about serving God. This is a subtle challenge. Very often, apathy creeps up on us by degrees, so that it has completely overwhelmed our character before we even notice it. Though it is subtle, it is extremely dangerous. Consider Jesus' warning to the church in Ephesus about their apathy in Revelation 2:4-5. If they didn't kick their apathy habit, Jesus would reject the church.
- B. Apathy is no less dangerous in our song worship than it is in any other area of our spiritual lives. We may still be going to services three times a week, still singing away at every hymn, yet not worshipping a lick. If this is where we are in our singing, we are nowhere near where God wants us to be. We need to watch out for it.
- C. The first major manifestation of apathy in our song worship is **INATTENTIVENESS**. Let me be honest with you, friends. This is a worship problem I battle on a regular basis. If I'm not careful, if I'm not constantly working on keeping my worship focus, it doesn't take more than a minute or two before my mind is off hopping down some bunny trail that has absolutely nothing to do with the song I'm singing. Nor do I think that I'm the only Christian who struggles with paying attention, either. This problem arises, I think, because we still haven't gotten the message that our song worship is all about the content that we are singing. We pay attention to sermons because we know that preaching is important. We pay attention in Bible class because we know that Bible study is important. We don't pay attention to hymns, though, because we haven't been taught that the words of those hymns are important too. Our behavior reflects our teaching.
- D. Sometimes, admittedly, this may not be our fault. Sometimes, we don't pay attention to the words of the hymns because there isn't any real meaning there to pay attention to. It takes a real spiritual warrior to keep focus through some of those clunkers we looked at yesterday morning. Mostly, though, we just need to consider the Bible's teaching on keeping spiritual focus. In this vein, let's look together at Paul's admonition to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:15-16. If we want to grow spiritually and be as useful spiritually as we can be, we have to be engrossed in the things of the spirit. That includes hymns too. If we want to fulfill God's goals, we can't just pay enough attention to turn to the right number. We have to think deeply about our hymns.
- E. Another symptom of apathy is **JOYLESSNESS**. This occurs when we feel no real emotional engagement to the hymns that we are singing. Even if we are paying some kind of lifeless intellectual attention to what we're singing, our spirits are entirely elsewhere. The problems with this joyless attitude are highlighted by David's plea for forgiveness in Psalm 51:12. Remember, David is writing this during his agony over his great sin with Bathsheba. He's trying to figure out what went wrong, and here's his inspired verdict. The reason why he fell is that he didn't take joy anymore in God's salvation. Friends, if we also stop taking joy in our relationship with our Father, the same thing will happen to us. People always look to find joy in something, and if we don't find joy in the things of the spirit, we will find it in the things of the flesh. Our song worship is a great way to watch over our hearts in this. We need to pay attention to the attitude that we have as we sing. Are we joyful, or are we joyless? If the latter is true, it poses a problem not just for our worship, but for our lives.
- F. Finally, apathy toward song worship can also appear in our **FAILURE TO LEARN**. After all, the primary thing that we are supposed to take from our worship is not an emotional high without substance or a foot-tapping

pleasure in having belted out the “old favorites,” but the ideas that our brethren have used to teach and admonish us. Our hymns are directed toward us just as much as our Bible classes and sermons are. If we don’t listen to these crucial instructional messages, we are missing the point of worship.

- G. Even more than that, though, we too often take those messages and fail to apply them in our lives. We sing, “Take Time to Be Holy,” yet never pause in our everyday hustle and bustle to spend a few minutes with God. We sing, “Something for Thee,” yet never consider the importance of doing at least one thing every day for Jesus. This is a tragic problem, but it is not a new one. Consider the words of James in James 1:22-24. When we fail to learn from and apply our hymns, this passage fits us to a T. We too have been shown God’s will for our lives in the hymns we sing, yet we go away and forget all about it rather than doing it.

II. Pride.

- A. Apathy can certainly cripple our worship, but an equally immense problem is posed by **PRIDE** that we allow to take root in our hearts. Pride is the sign of the heart that chooses to rely on itself rather than on God. We become proud when we point to things that we have done as evidence that we are better than someone else or at least worthy of respect. Sometimes, however, pride can have the opposite effect. When we fail to live up to our own standards and begin to look down on ourselves and beat ourselves up, that’s nothing more than the dark side of pride. In both cases, the problem is trusting in self, whether we succeed or fail at it.
- B. Of course, neither pride nor low-self esteem should be part of the emotional trappings of the Christian. Peter makes this point in 1 Peter 5:5. Remember, friends, humility and envious worthlessness are not the same thing. When we are humble, we don’t look at ourselves. Instead, we look at God, who is incomparably above us. We realize that nothing we can do will measure up to Him, but that’s OK, because it is not our own actions that endow us with worth. Instead, our worth is measured by the price that God paid for us. Because we have been bought with the infinitely precious blood of Christ, each one of us is of infinite value. There’s nothing we can do to add to that value, so we don’t need to try. Instead of being prideful, we can be content.
- C. When we forget this, though, and become prideful, one of the most common ways this manifests itself is in **REFUSAL TO SING**. Sadly, this is quite common in the church, both among men and boys who think it’s not macho to sing, and among all those who think they can’t sing. If this is our attitude, it’s clearly caused by an ungodly focus on the self. We are worried that others will think less of us if we sing and they hear us, and we are so concerned about their opinion of us that we allow the possibility of disapproval to silence us entirely.
- D. That’s the wrong attitude to have, friends. We can’t allow the disapproval of men to lead us to forfeit the approval of God. God’s expectations are laid out in Romans 12:6. Certainly, there are deaf Christians and mute Christians who can’t sing, at least not in the way we do. However, if we have the capacity to sing, even if that capacity is just to make a “joyful noise before the Lord,” God expects us to use it. Folks, God isn’t expecting opera solos out of people who can’t carry a tune in a bucket. In fact, God isn’t really concerned with the quality of the sound we make at all. As long as we are striving with all our hearts to teach and admonish our brethren and give the glory to Him, He’s pleased with that, and if God is pleased, we should be too.
- E. At the other end of the scale, sometimes pride rears its ugly head in a **FOCUS ON SINGING**. Generally, this problem appears in people who believe that they have a talent for singing, whether validly or not, and try to use that gift to impress others. They turn the worship of the Most High into little more than a pretext for elevating the self. In reality, of course, it is impossible for any of us to be or do anything that actually does elevate us. Let’s look at God’s own words about this in Jeremiah 9:23-24. In spiritual terms, none of our attributes are worth anything. We are valuable not because we can sing well, but because we know God.
- F. At the same time, though, we need to be careful neither to ignore singing altogether nor condemn others for what we think their attitude is. Remember, friends, our singing is an offering to God, and that means that we need to offer Him our best. If we don’t put that effort into our singing, our hearts won’t be right either. For that reason, just because we happen to be sitting in front of a talented singer doesn’t mean that we should assume they’re singing for the wrong reasons. They may just be giving God the best they have too.
- G. Finally, a pride problem can make itself evident in our **INGRATITUDE**. Of course, ingratitude arises in a much more general way than merely in our song worship, but it can certainly show up there. Consider what the Hebrews writer reveals about the place of thanksgiving in worship in Hebrews 13:15. It’s fair to say, though, that if our thankfulness is evident on our lips but not in our hearts, that’s not the worship God is looking for either. This can be an easy trap to fall into when we forget what God has done for us, or, perhaps more insidiously, fail to acknowledge our debt to Him on an emotional as well as an intellectual level. The Bible tells us quite plainly in James 1 that every good thing that we have is given to us by God. We absolutely need God for every breath we take, and we need to constantly glorify Him for the way that He provides. When we start looking to ourselves as the source of the blessings we have, when we start denying that we need God either physically or spiritually, that’s when our ingratitude and pride destroy our worship. If we want to worship according to the Bible’s terms, we need to have a heart that is humbled before God and always acknowledges our utter vulnerability and our complete dependence on Him.

Conclusion. If your life has become tainted by these or other sins, you need to make things right with God.